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RIVER: A Reflective Analysis of An Original

Suite for Jazz Orchestra

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RIVER: A Reflective Analysis of An Original Suite for Jazz Orchestra

by

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Thesis

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RIVER: A Reflective Analysis of An Original Suite for Jazz Orchestra

by

Bryan Earle Kennard, M.M.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

Supervisor: John R. Mills

The purpose of this thesis is to provide an analysis of the musical and non-musical elements that were used to compose *RIVER*, an original suite for jazz orchestra. It is also a means by which I can reflect on the process of composing a large form, multi-movement work. The challenges that a project like this poses for a writer are both exciting and formidable.

I will discuss *RIVER* in terms of its melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic elements. Form and orchestration will also be factored into the conversation covering the six primary movements and referencing the interludes as they apply to the general analysis.

The opportunities to grow as a composer from this project are not to be overlooked. I have come away with a greater understanding of the writing process, as well as my strengths and weaknesses.

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Chapter One: Background, Influences, and Inspiration

In 2012 and 2013, I raced in the Texas Water Safari (TWS), an annual event dubbed the "world's toughest canoe race." The event is a 260-mile canoe race beginning in San Marcos, Texas and ending in Seadrift, Texas on the coast. The experience of completing the race twice had a significant impact on my local and world view. As I realized that undertaking a task as large as the TWS is not for the faint of heart, it became clearer to me that I had participated in something to which only a select few could relate. Reflecting on the races, I decided that it would be appropriate to compose an original, modern suite for big band to retell some of the experiences I had on the river.

Once planning began, I quickly realized that my story alone was not the only portrayal of the TWS. Through social media, I extended an invitation to other members of the Water Safari community to submit stories they felt were significant and highlighted elements of the race. From these submissions, I gravitated toward certain phrases or experiences that I thought were particularly musical in nature, or described a part of the race that could not be overlooked.

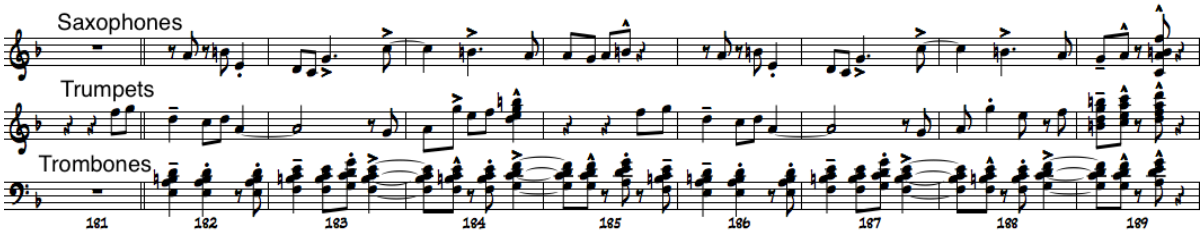
The decision to write for a large jazz ensemble was made in part for the ease of future playability. Writing for a full big band allows for a greater likelihood that the work can be performed again. It was also my intent to write each movement so that it could stand alone and be performed apart from the work as a whole.

Knowing that I wanted to write a multi-movement suite for big band, I sought out existing works from which I could model *RIVER*. I have been greatly influenced by

the compositions of Darcy James Argue, Maria Schneider, and Dave Holland among others. Each of these has inspired me to use different techniques and approaches to composing for a jazz orchestra.

Dave Holland's big band was one of the first I began to listen to and analyze more intently than any I had previously heard. Holland's use of ostinatos, groove, and section writing made an impact on me so that when I began writing more large ensemble compositions, I could not help but allow some of these techniques to seep into my works. The first movement of *RIVER,* "Morning at the Springs," is perhaps the best example of some of Holland's influence, especially mm. 158-189 where the layers that build over the ostinato increase the intensity and serve as a send-off into the next solo space. This also creates dense counterpoints between sections of the band. See Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1



Both Maria Schneider and Darcy Argue are popular composers for the modern day big band, and both have contributed greatly to my sense of melody, harmony, rhythm, and style. I have always admired Schneider's melodic and harmonic construction, especially when introducing thematic material gradually through the beginning of a piece. At several points in *RIVER*, I attempted to replicate the sense of allowing a composition to organically emerge from the material presented at the start

of the movement. This will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. Schneider and Argue each demonstrate a rhythmic looseness when writing melodies, an element that I have tried to incorporate into my writing. This looseness often gives their melodies a floating quality over the pulse of the music as it develops.

Each of the aforementioned composers have written suites or programmatic works for large ensemble, so I looked to these works to determine how to construct the framework for my suite. Holland's *Monterey Suite* recorded on his *Overtime* (2005) album is comprised of four movements. I knew that I would need more than four movements to properly capture the image of the TWS in music, but the *Monterey Suite* gave me a good idea of the pacing of fast and slow movements as well as a sense of the need to change styles between movements to keep the listener interested.

While many of Schneider's compositions have had an impact on me for a variety of reasons, I was particularly drawn to her most recent album, *The Thompson Fields* (2015), for her programmatic depiction of an important place. Schneider is an expert at expressing moods within the compositions on this album, and she evokes feelings and emotions in a way few other jazz composers capture. She embeds a level of sophistication and complexity in her writing that I tried to emulate in several movements of *RIVER.*

Perhaps the most influential to the structure of my suite was Darcy Argue's two most recent albums: *Brooklyn Babylon* (2013) and *Real Enemies* (2016). Both are programmatic and either tell a story or encompass an overarching theme. The former contains a series of short movements separated by brief interludes. This layout

appealed to me as it gave me a method for including more aspects of the TWS in the completed musical representation. *Real Enemies* helped me realize that the best way to incorporate the stories I had received from fellow racers was to play sound bites of excerpts during the performance. As I wrote the music to *RIVER*, I kept the placement of these excerpts in mind. Both of Argue's recordings have common thematic threads that run throughout each work, and I knew that I wanted a similar sense of connectivity from start to finish in my composition.

Chapter Two: Structure and Form

RIVER is divided into six movements for a standard big band plus an additional flute part on four of the movements. Each movement is separated by an interlude which is either made up of a chamber ensemble within the larger ensemble, pre-recorded audio excerpts of the stories I received, or both. In this chapter, I will discuss the general structure, form, and function of the piece as a whole and its individual movements.

Using both my personal experiences with the Safari and the stories that had been submitted to me, I selected some of the most important, or most infamous, aspects of the race. Once I had settled on the events or places I wanted to depict, I struggled with deciding on an order. It was important to me to have an order to the events that equally told a nearly chronological story of the river race, but also allowed the music to flow.

At this point in the compositional process, I had completed the movements 1. "Morning at the Springs" and 5. "Lost at the Logjam," but was still conceptualizing the remaining movements. In order to make decisions regarding the final order, I had to coalesce my ideas for the other four movements. Once the themes, styles, and forms for each of the movements began to solidify, I was finally able to set the order.

I now realized that the six movements I had originally planned would not be enough to tell the story alone and I would need to supplement them with short interludes. By inserting these interludes, I intended to not only fill in the story gaps, but also provide some artistic connective tissue between movements. They also

became the perfect vehicles for the pre-recorded excerpts which became essential aids to depicting the events of the race. With these interludes, the final program was decided:

1. Morning at the Springs

   Interlude I: Hut!

2. T.C.

   Interlude II: Confluence

3. Portage at Ottine

   Interlude III: Current

4. Hallucinate

   Interlude IV: Eyes in the Dark

5. Lost at the Logjam

   Interlude V: Exhaustion

6. The Bay to Seadrift

   Epilogue: Providence

During the writing process, I decided that I wanted *RIVER* to have an arch structure to create a larger connection between the material at the beginning to the material at the end. This method is a way to tie together the movements using related motives, and it helps foster the build in tension to the middle of the work and the eventual release of that tension at the end.

Some of the movements share many commonalities like 2. "T.C." and 5. "Lost at the Logjam." While they are very different pieces, their similar thematic material and

position within the overall piece ties them together. The same could be said for 1. "Morning at the Springs" and 6. "The Bay to Seadrift," though the similarities are stronger between these two bookend movements. While sharing the ¾ time signature, 6. "The Bay to Seadrift" also revisits a significant amount of the material from 1. "Morning at the Springs." The former also modifies the bass ostinato from 1. "Morning at the Springs." I will discuss many of these connections in much more detail in the next chapter.

Each of the previously mentioned movements share common thematic ideas with their opposing movements, but 3. "Portage at Ottine" and 4. "Hallucinate" appear to be polar opposites. However, despite their differences, they have common ground. They are the two most tense and harmonically explorative of the six movements, which will be discussed below. The entire work centers around these drastic extremes in tempo, tonality, and distorted melodic references.

Each movement in *RIVER* is through-composed in that there are no large form repeats. However, formal elements are apparent within individual movements, and several have greater overarching forms. For example, 1. "Morning at the Springs" does not begin with a full statement of the melody. Table 2.1 outlines the movement's loose formal structure. After several measures of introductory material, the fragmented melody prominently emerges in m. 48 and repeats several times before reaching its fullest statement at m. 68. I would consider this entire section to be an "A" section of the piece. The "B" section begins at m. 83 with a variation on the melodic material. This gives way to the piano solo, which does not follow any of the

harmonic material set up in the first 118 measures. Following a long ensemble vamp, the tenor solo enters with harmonic progressions based on the “A” and “B” sections. As the tenor solo ends, a varied statement of the “A” section is played and gives way to a short coda. Stepping back from the smaller internal sections, it has a ternary form with an introduction and short coda - Intro, ABA’, Coda - that arches over the entirety of the movement.

Table 2.1: "Morning at the Springs"

Section	Intro	A		B		A’			Coda
Event		a	b	Piano Solo	Ensemble Vamp	Tenor Solo	b	a	Coda
Key	F- Eb Shifting	Eb	Ab-Ebmi	Dmi	F	Emi-Shifting	D	F	F/A
Measure	1	48	83	111	158	190	217	244	256

In Figures 2.3-2.7, each of the remaining five movements have been analyzed as above.

Table 2.2: "T.C." (or "Team Captain")

A	B	A	A	B	Coda
		Tenor Solo	Backgrounds	Flute Solo	Coda
Ab-Shifting	Eb-Ab	Ab-Shifting	Ab-Shifting	Eb-Gb	Ab
1	49	82	130	171	224

Table 2.3: "Portage at Ottine"

Intro	A	Interlude	A	A	B	A	Coda
			Euphonium and Flugelhorn Solos				
Dmi-ish	Shifting	Shifting	Shifting	Shifting	Dma7(b9)	Shifting	Dmi-ish
1	16	25	36	44	52	58	67

Table 2.4: "Hallucinate"

A	B	C	A	D	A
		Alto Solo		Trombone Solo	
Shifting Throughout					
1	54	76	162	192	244

Table 2.5: "Lost at the Logjam"

Intro	A	A'	B	Tag	A	B'
	Melody 1	Melody 1&2	Melody 3		Melody 1	Melody 2&3
Unclear	Dmi	Dmi	Eb	Db-Dmi	Dmi	Eb
1	21	29	37	49	53	61

ABA	A		Interlude	Intro'	A	B
Guitar Solo	Loops	Drum Solo	"Ottine"			Melody 2&3
Dmi	Dmi		Dmi-ish	Dmi	Dmi	Eb
72	97	113	116	129	137	145

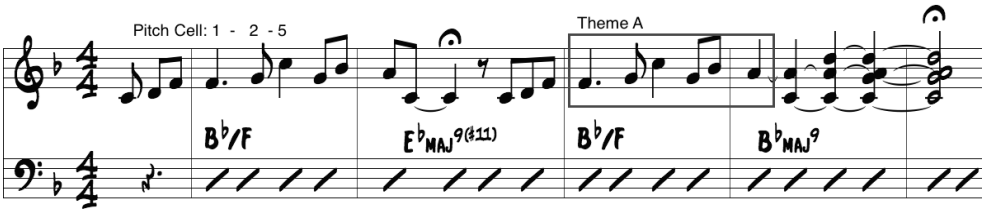
Table 2.6: "The Bay to Seadrift"

Intro	A	B	C	Soli	ABC	A	B	Coda
					Alto Solo			
Cmi	Shifting	Eb-ish	Ebmi-Gb	Shifting	Cmi	Shifting	Eb-ish	F
1	126	136	154	169	185	251	261	278

Chapter Three: Linear Materials and Key Motives

In writing a large form, programmatic composition spanning several movements, I thought it would be necessary to have some common threads that tie the movements together. These thematic elements, some overtly apparent and others more obscure, provided me with the means to give each movement a sense of familiarity. In some cases, themes were derived from a one-off countermelody while others were taken from much larger melodies. A majority of themes in *RIVER*, however, emerge from elements within the opening melody.

Figure 3.1: Theme A and 1-2-5 Pitch Cell

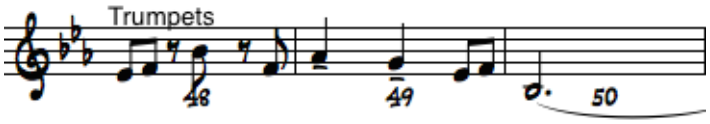


In Figure 3.1 above, the opening melody of 1. “Morning at the Springs” provides the thematic backbone for the entire work. This rubato statement introduces the listener to the melodic material that is found throughout the composition, particularly the diatonic pitch cell 1-2-5, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. Theme A, which is partially derived from the pitch cell, is the most referenced motive in *RIVER,* and it appears in nearly every movement at least once. Following the introductory statement, Theme A is twisted, stretched, and developed throughout 1. “Morning at the Springs” as can be seen in Figure 3.2. In Figure 3.2a, the first alteration to Theme A is made rhythmically and it is also extended. In the next example, the melody is again rhythmically altered by way of a

polyrhythm of four notes over three beats. Figure 3.2c is an inversion of 3.2a. The melody is placed into rhythmic augmentation in the final excerpt where each note receives two beats instead of the length of an eighth note.

Figure 3.2: Development of Theme A in "Morning at the Springs"

a.



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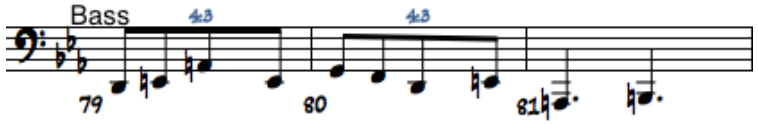

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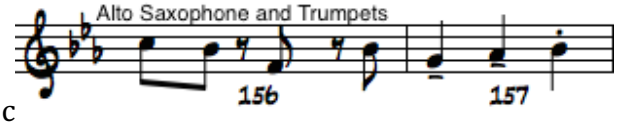

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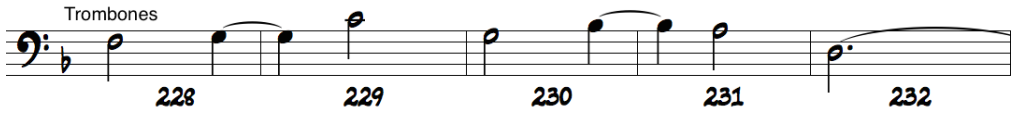
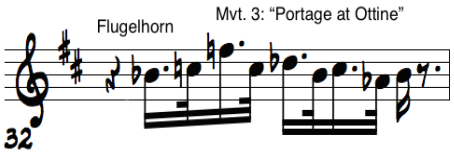


As the work continues, variations of Theme A are stated in the subsequent movements. The melody is occasionally fragmented and usually rhythmically altered. Figure 3.3 shows some of the instances where Theme A is referenced in other movements. In the first of these examples, the shape has been given a dotted rhythm and has changed modally (now in minor). 3.2b has also seen a modal alteration, but is now stretched across a measure of 5/4. In Figure 3.2c from 6. "The Bay to Seadrift," Theme A returns in its near original form in rapid succession between sections of the band.

Figure 3.3: References to Theme A in later movements

a.



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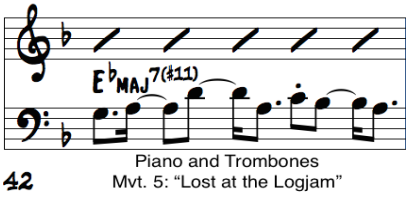

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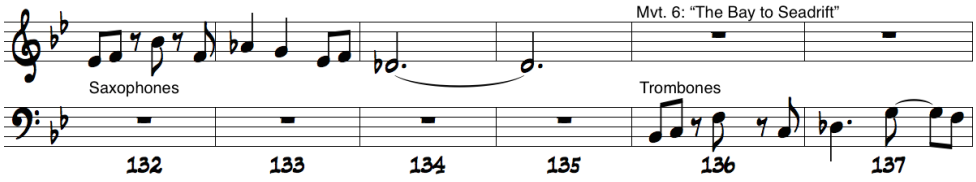
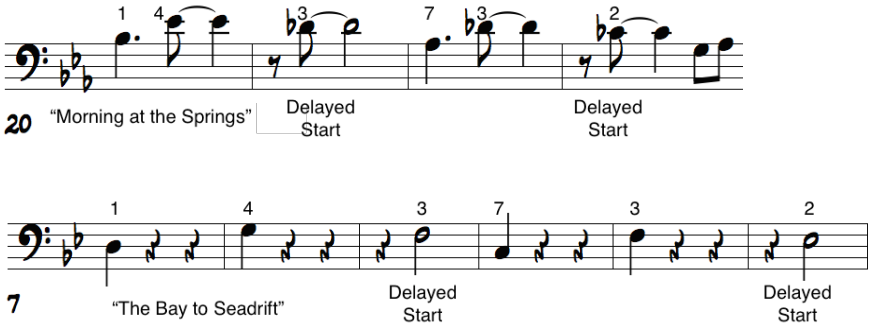


As was alluded to in the last chapter, there is a strong connection between 1. "Morning at the Springs" and 6. "The Bay to Seadrift." The most visible similarity is the prevalence of Theme A in both movements, but they also share several motives with each other. The bass ostinato from 1. "Morning at the Springs," beginning at m. 20, becomes an integral part of 6. "The Bay to Seadrift." See Figure 3.4.

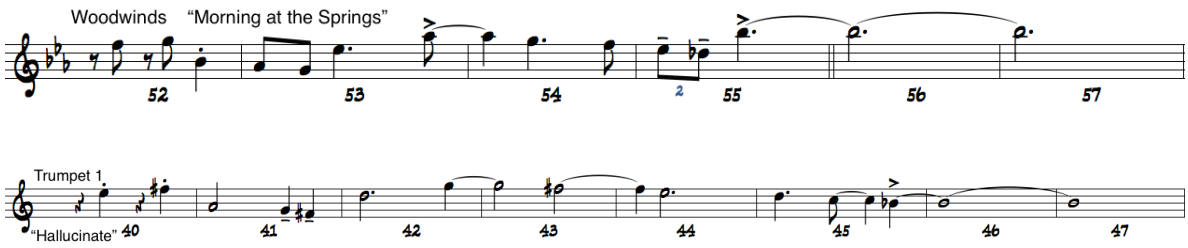
Figure 3.4: Ostinato Bass Lines From "Morning at the Springs" and "The Bay to Seadrift"



The next prominent motive, which I have labeled Theme B, appears first as a

responding melody to a thematic statement in 1. “Morning at the Springs” at m. 52. Later in the movement, it is played by the saxophone section as a part of the ensemble vamp (mm. 174-189). After that, the theme is not referenced again until 4. “Hallucinate.” Theme B provides the movement with much of its melodic and rhythmic material. First stated in fragmentation, the melody gradually emerges with each subsequent entrance until it is stated in full in mm. 40-47. See Figure 3.5.

Example 3.5: Theme B as it appears in Movements One and Four

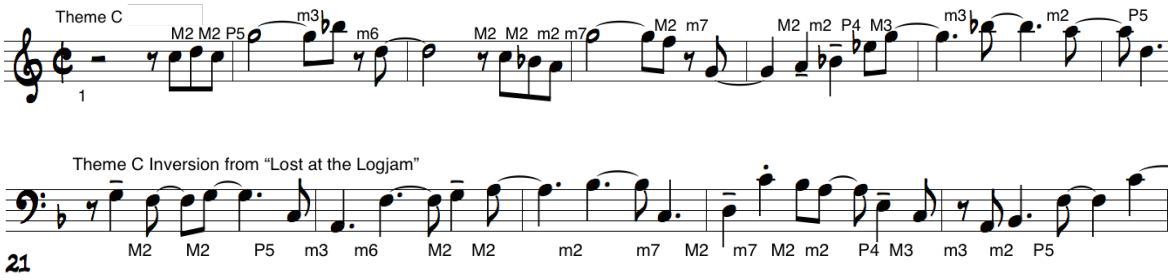


The first appearance of Theme B seems inconsequential to the piece as a whole, but by providing the listener with a glimpse of the melody in 1. “Morning at the Springs,” the figure has a stronger foundation when it is finally reintroduced in 4. “Hallucinate.” Like many of the other motives in *RIVER*, the seeds for Theme B are planted early on and given new life later in the piece. The same could be said for the themes found in 2. “T.C.” and 5. “Lost at the Logjam.”

In 2. “T.C.,” Theme A is not referenced once, and it is the only movement in which this is the case. I felt that it would be more effective to introduce new thematic material that has a significant connection to later movements rather than continue to beat the listener over the head with the opening theme. I wrote the Theme C, which is initially derived from the 1-2-5 pitch cell, based on one of the melodies from 5. “Lost

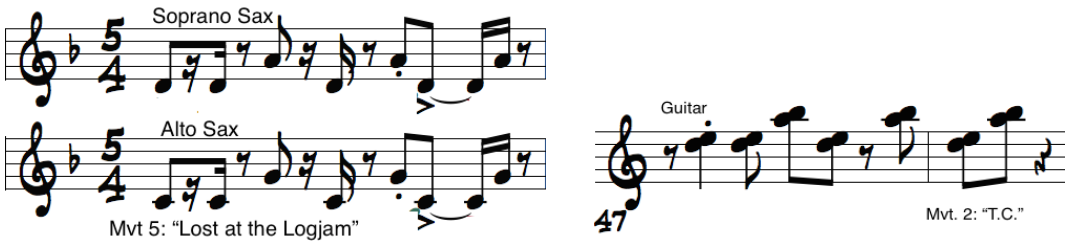
at the Logjam," which was written prior 2. "T.C." The two melodies, while not rhythmically similar, share the same intervallic shape in inversion with one another. In Figure 3.6, notice how each interval is exactly the same.

Figure 3.6: Comparison of Theme C to its Inversion from "Lost at the Logjam." M=Major; m=minor; P=Perfect.



The two movements share other motivic similarities in addition to Theme C. Much like the initial statement of Theme B is unobtrusively presented in 1. "Morning at the Springs" before it is expanded in 4. "Hallucinate," the opening ostinato of 5. "Lost at the Logjam" has its roots in a brief interjection from 2. "T.C." See Figure 3.7.

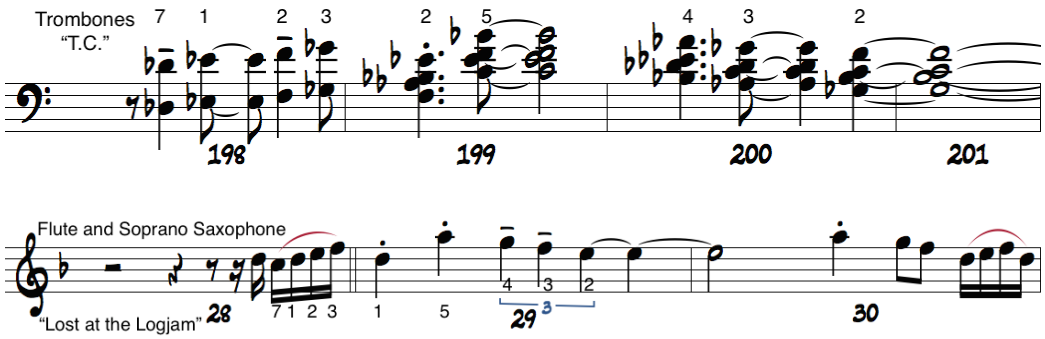
Figure 3.7: Major 2nd Ostinato and "T.C." Reference



Another motivic connection between 2. "T.C." and 5. "Lost at the Logjam" can be found in a small background figure. At m. 198 in 2. "T.C.," the trombones play a harmonized line that is melodically derived from one of the other melodies in 5. "Lost at the Logjam." This harmonized fragment is then expanded by the bass in Interlude II. The melody is finally stated in full in 5. "Lost at the Logjam" where it fits into the

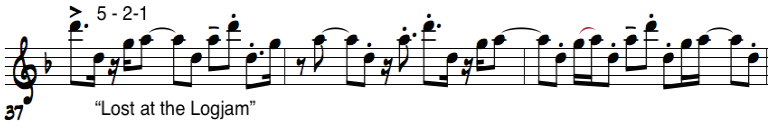
tangled, contrapuntal web of the movement. See Figure 3.8.

Figure 3.8: Related Melodic Fragments



The diatonic pitch cell 1-2-5 is frequently used in the creation of motives in *RIVER*, and because it is easily invertible and harmonically simple, it can be used frequently over a number of progressions. Most of these motives are subordinate lines with little melodic prominence. However, one of these cell-based motives is a strong melodic theme is in "Lost at the Logjam." At m. 37, the flute, soprano saxophone, and guitar play a unison melody based off the pitch cell. Similarly, I use this shape at m. 41 in 2. "T.C.," though this figure functions more like a brief ostinato at the conclusion of the melody than as a strong melodic statement itself. In the concluding measures of 2. "T.C." and 6. "The Bay to Seadrift," I use the pitch set to create a polyrhythm between guitar and piano to transition into the subsequent interlude or epilogue. The motive forms an angular, striking bass line in 4. "Hallucinate." See Figure 3.9.

Figure 3.9: Diatonic Pitch Cell Appearances

a. 

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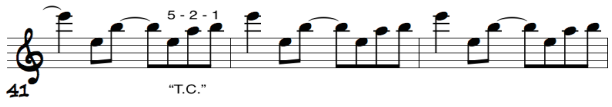

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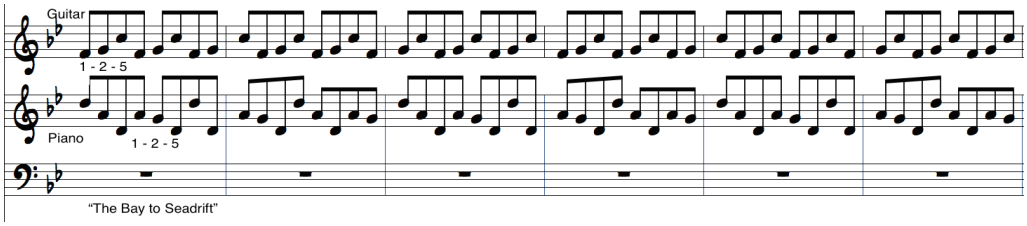

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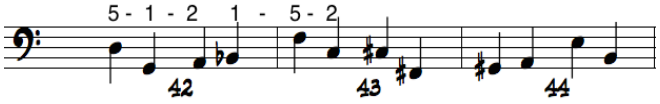
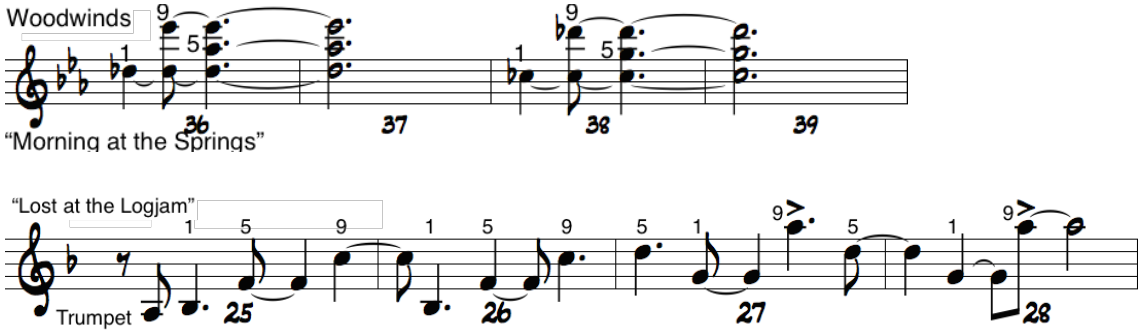


Perfect fifths also appear with some thematic regularity. In 1. "Morning at the Springs," fifths first emerge at mm. 36-39 in the woodwinds. Here he pitches are stated in succession: 1-9-5. What results is a pair of perfect fifths stacked on top of each other. This motive returns several times throughout the movement, though the pitches are not always played in the same order, and it is also referenced in 5. "Lost at the Logjam" at the tail end of its eight-measure melody. See Figure 3.10.

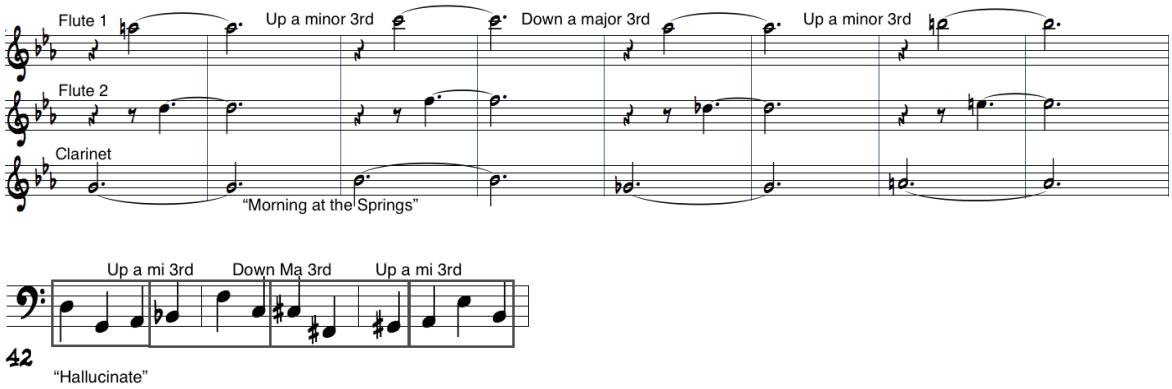
Figure 3.10: Perfect Fifth Motive in Movements One and Five



It is also important to point out that when the fifths return in mm. 98-109 of 1. "Morning at the Springs," they hold the source material for the harmonic motion of the fourth movement bass line mentioned in Figure 3.8. Since two perfect fifths

stacked on one another can be intervallicaly condensed to form the 1-2-5 pitch cell, it is easy to relate these figures. In 1. “Morning at the Springs,” the groups of fifths shift by thirds, and this motion is mimicked by the bassline in 4. “Hallucinate.” See Example 3.11.

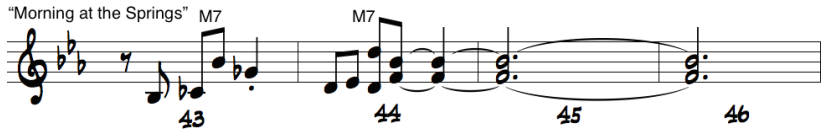
Figure 3.11: Perfect 5ths and "Hallucinate" Bassline



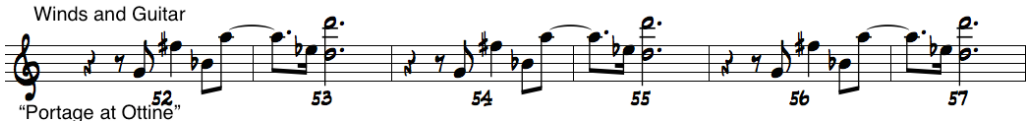
In addition to the perfect fifth, the major seventh interval is also referenced frequently. Like the perfect fifth motives, the sevenths occur in several woodwind statements throughout 1. “Morning at the Springs.” These snaking, intervallic leaps give buoyancy to the movement and add some interesting color tones to the bass ostinato and brass pads, especially in mm. 43-44, 61-63, and 151-152. See Figure 3.12a. Major sevenths make another appearance in the backgrounds in 3. “Portage at Ottine.” At mm. 52-57, the winds and guitar build a pyramid of consecutive seventh intervals over the double harmonic (to be discussed in the next chapter) harmony creating a D triad over Eb triad sound. Similarly, the pyramid at mm. 54-57 in 4. “Hallucinate” highlights the interval through two augmented triads built a major seventh apart creating the hexatonic pitch set B-D-Eb-F#-G-A#.

Figure 3.12: Major Seventh Motives

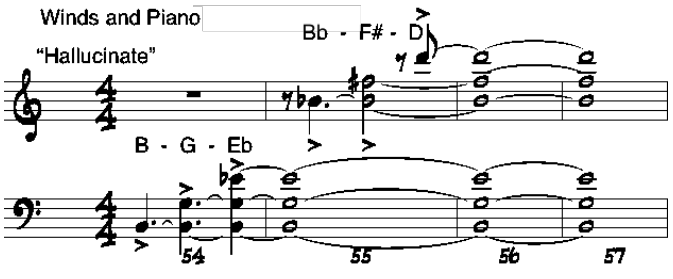
a.



b.

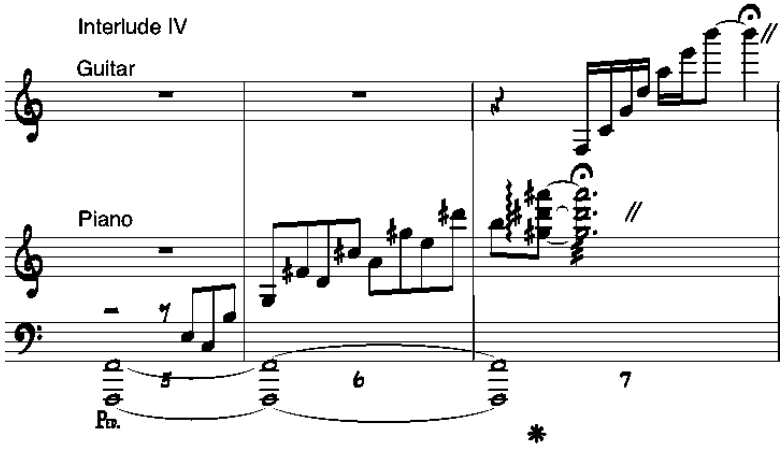


c.



Interlude IV combines the perfect fifth and major seventh motives. The piano plays a sequence of sevenths that ascend by perfect fifths, and as the piano reaches the peak of its line, the guitar follows with a series of ascending fifths. See Figure 3.13.

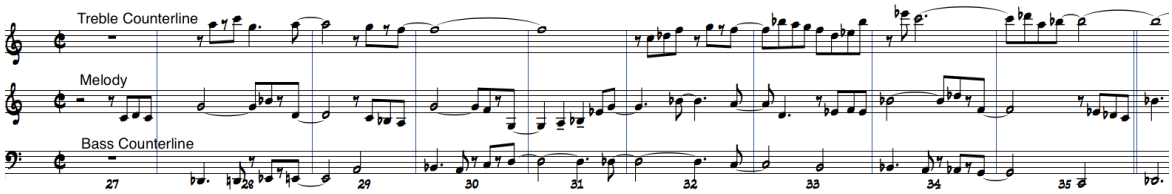
Figure 3.13: Interlude IV, Fifth and Seventh Motives



In addition to melodic ideas and motives, the use of counterpoint and imitation are essential to the development of linear materials. Some of the best uses of

counterpoint can be found in 2. “T.C.” and 5. “Lost at the Logjam.” The opening to 2. “T.C.” starts with just the melody, then adds a new layer with each statement until there are three distinct lines in the flute and piano, trumpets and clarinet, and bass and bass clarinet. See Figure 3.14.

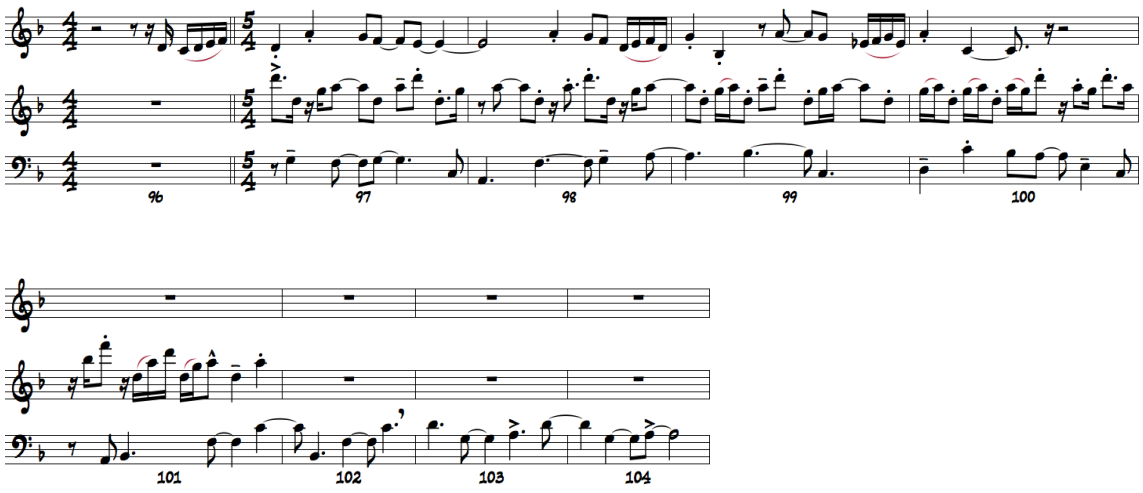
Figure 3.14: Three-Voice Counterpoint in "T.C."



Another technique with which I experimented in 5. “Lost at the Logjam” was the use of loops. I recently learned about some of the techniques early video game music composers used to create their now iconic soundtracks. Limited to just a few channels of sound, these composers developed a method of overlapping loops of different lengths to create the sense that a piece sounded more complicated than it was.

In 5. “Lost at the Logjam,” there are three main melodies of differing lengths: Theme C (inverted) is eight measures long, the melody based on the 1-2-5 pitch set is five measures, and the third theme is three measures plus four beats. The three lines are played separately or paired with one another early on, but they come together at m. 97. These combine for some dense counterpoint with limited editing to make the loops fit together harmonically. See Figure 3.15.

Example 3.15 Logjam Loops

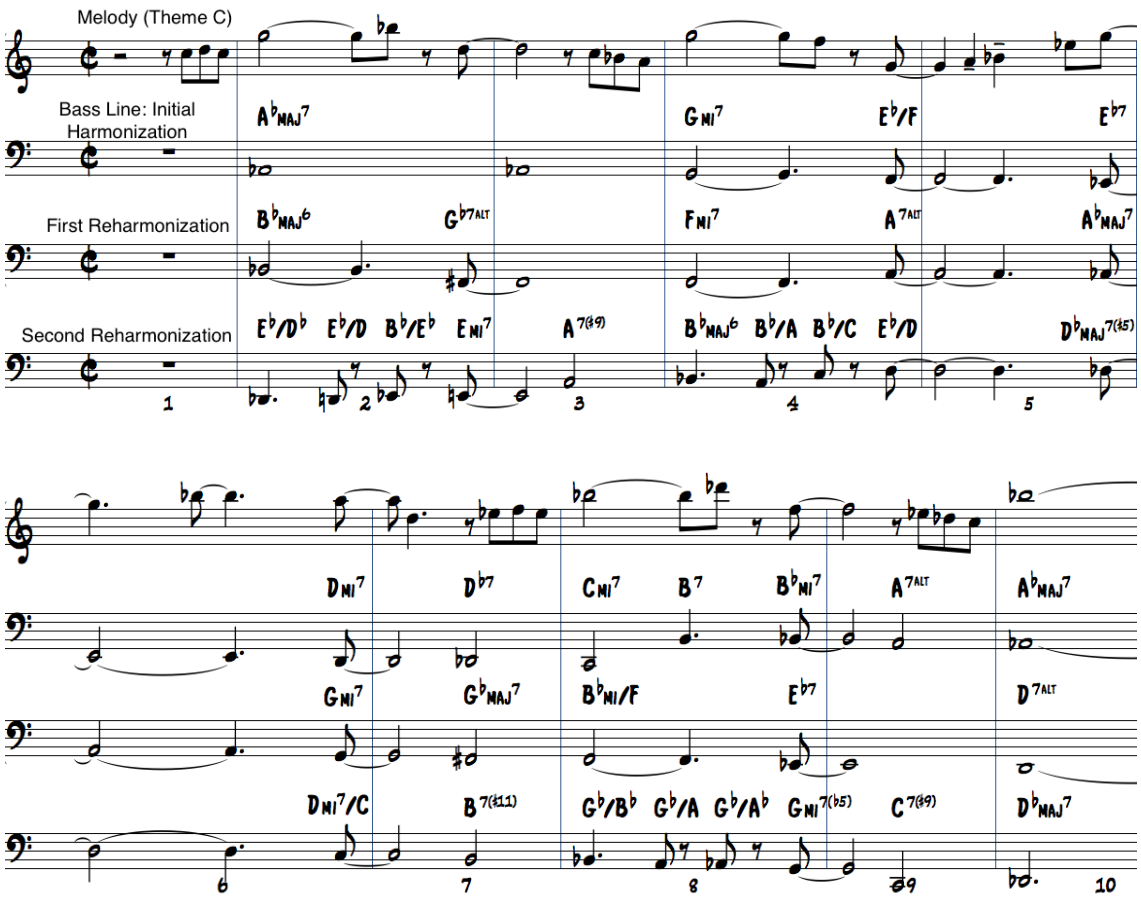


Chapter Four: Harmonic Materials

Harmony is the engine that drives mood and emotion in music, and based on my experience with the TWS, I wanted to convey several emotions. I have experimented with several harmonic devices in writing *RIVER*. While most of the chords are fairly standard, there are few traditional progressions present, and those that are usually resolve in some non-standard way. I also use some harmonies that are a little more adventurous. For example, 2. "T.C." sounds like one of the most straightforward movements in the suite. In reality, it does the most harmonic shape-shifting.

At the start of the movement, the melody is repeated three times. However, each statement of the melody receives a different harmonic treatment, and each chord progression becomes a little more adventurous. As I pointed out in Figure 3.14, the bass line to the third progression serves as a contrapuntal voice as well as the guide for the harmonic motion. See how each of the progressions compare in Figure 4.1. As the melody returns for the fourth time and is transposed for the fifth time, it yet again follows a new chord progression.

Figure 4.1: Shifting Bass Lines in "T.C."



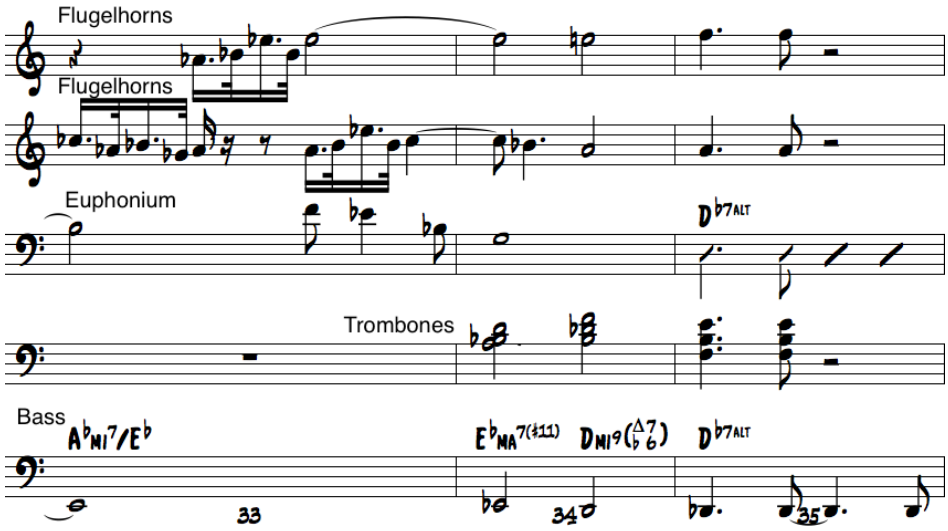
In 1. "Morning at the Springs," there are instances of side slipping harmonies and melodies through the introduction, but the harmonic motion is limited. There is one passing chord that adds a little interest to the progression. At m. 73, a C#mi/F chord creates a moment of bitonality as the C#mi sound floats on top of the F bass note as it resolves down to E. This "confused third" chord appears again at m. 207 as Gmi/B during the solo. These are both very fleeting in the grand scheme of the movement, but I was so intrigued by this chord that I decided to make it a main harmonic element in 3. "Portage at Ottine."

Within the chord, a Bbmi/D which first appears in m. 5, the Bb minor triad functions more like upper extensions to the D in the bass. The resulting chord alludes to a tonal center of D harmonic minor. The euphonium melody that enters in m. 8 slides between this tonality and the Ebma7(#11). This *harmonic* sound reappears throughout the rest of the movement in different forms including harmonic major (m. 25) and the double harmonic scale (m. 51).

As I suggested, 3. "Portage at Ottine" toys with a sense of bitonality, especially whenever the double harmonic scale is present. One way to conceive of this harmony is to think about a D major seventh chord mixed with an Eb major seventh chord. The two of these chords are outlined in the pyramid backgrounds, which can be seen in Figure 3.12.

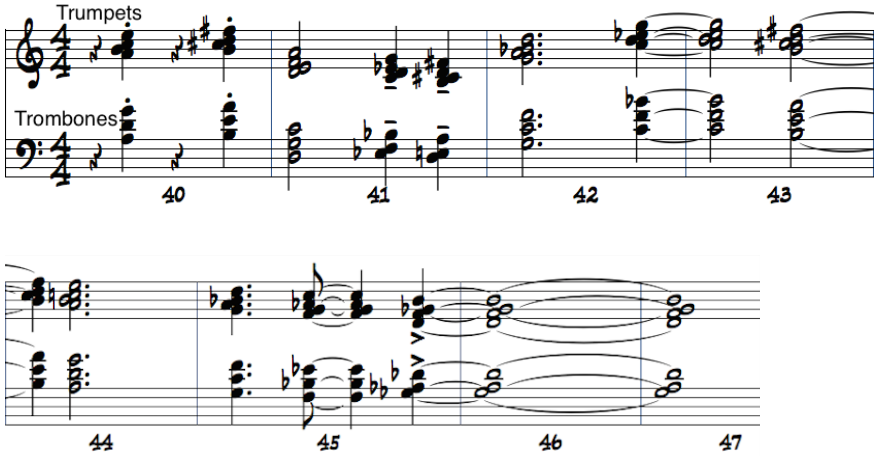
One final, interesting progression using this *harmonic* sound occurs in mm. 33-34. The Abmi7/Eb -> Ebma7(#11) creates a nice effect with the b6-5 suspension in the flugelhorns. By the time the harmony moves to the Dmi9(ma7, b6), an E natural, A natural and G are present in the chord, which means the entire D harmonic minor scale is represented in the final two beats of m. 34. See Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: "Portage at Ottine" Excerpt



4. "Hallucinate" provides some interesting harmonic choices as well. The opening begins with the brass playing in chromatically parallel block harmony. I wanted to make these minor 11th voicings one of the primary characteristics of the movement. They also help to darken an otherwise major-sounding melody that, along with the shifts between double and half time feels, gives this movement a sense of split personalities. See Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3: Minor 11th Voicings in "Hallucinate"



In mm. 54-60 and 190-193, the horns build a pyramid using a hexatonic pitch set including B-D-Eb-F#-G-A#. The two augmented triads revisit the major seventh interval as show in Figure 3.12. This chord returns in close position harmony in mm. 120-121, a point of highest tension before the band cuts loose back into double time.

I knew 5. "Lost at the Logjam" was going to be technically challenging to put together. Having several intricate melodic lines playing at the same time in 5/4 time left me with few options for harmonic exploration. Because of this, I decided that 5. "Lost at the Logjam" would have the least complicated harmonic progressions out of all the movements. This also allows the improvisers to stretch out more in their improvisations because the soloist has more harmonic freedom than the other movements.

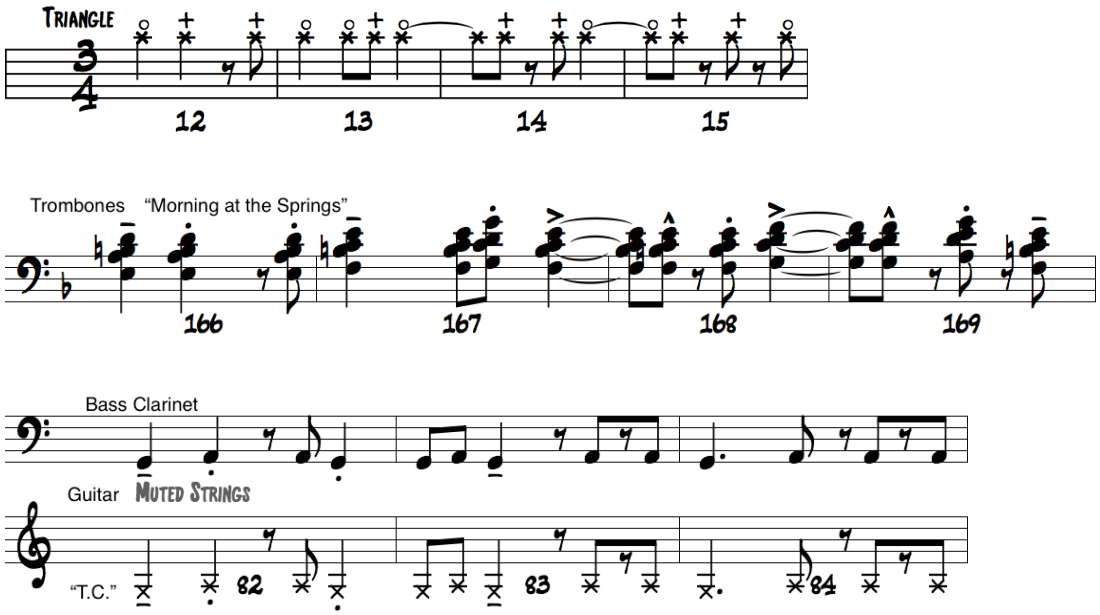
6. "Lost at the Logjam" revisits much of the harmonic material from 1. "Morning at the Springs," but there is one surprise harmony that sticks out in former. At m. 134, a Dbma7/E appears as a passing chord into the next section. This particular sound revisits the harmonic minor color from 3. "Portage at Ottine," so I extend this harmony for a full eight measures at mm. 205-212 during the alto solo. This moment of harmonic minor provides a launching point into the remainder of the solo before returning to the melody.

Chapter Five: Rhythmic Materials

Rhythm is one of the most useful tools for creating interest in a composition. I constantly think about rhythm as a means to vary the thematic elements of the composition. This gives the music a sense of evolution and change as has already been displayed in several examples above like Figures 3.2 and 3.3. However, theme A is not the only motive that is taken through many rhythmic mutations in *RIVER*.

In m. 12 of 1. "Morning at the Springs," the triangle plays a rhythm that returns several times throughout the suite, and it changes from merely a time-keeping motive to a harmonic and melodic one. In Figure 5.1, the original rhythm is compared to some of the other instances where it appears.

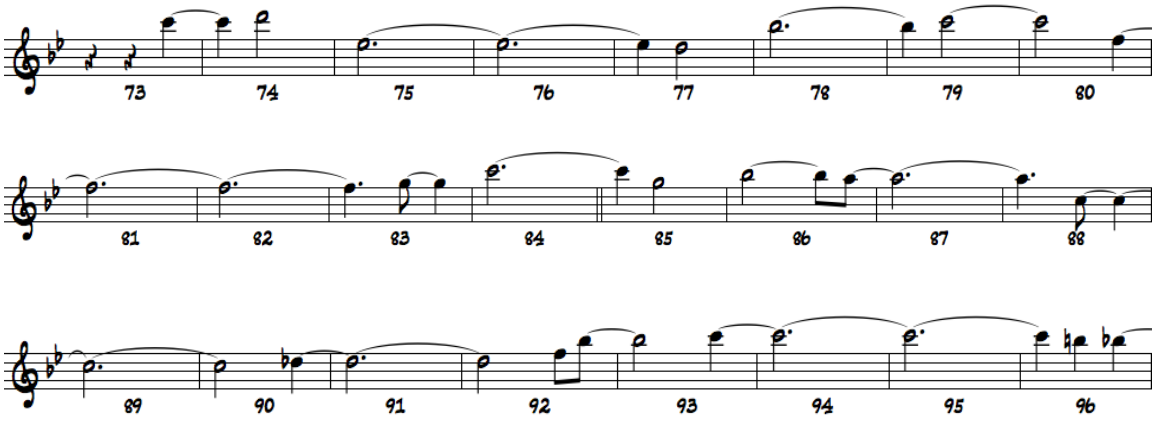
Figure 5.1: Triangle Rhythm



As I mentioned in Chapter One, I have been influenced by Maria Schneider and Darcy Argue's execution of rhythmic freedom in their compositions. This looseness

does not necessarily ignore pulse, but just blurs it for the listener. To effectively do this, melodies may stray away from downbeats through delay or anticipation. Notice how the melody from 6. “The Bay to Seadrift” avoids emphasizing too many of the downbeats in Figure 5.2. This achieves a sense that the lines are floating on top of the other musical elements.

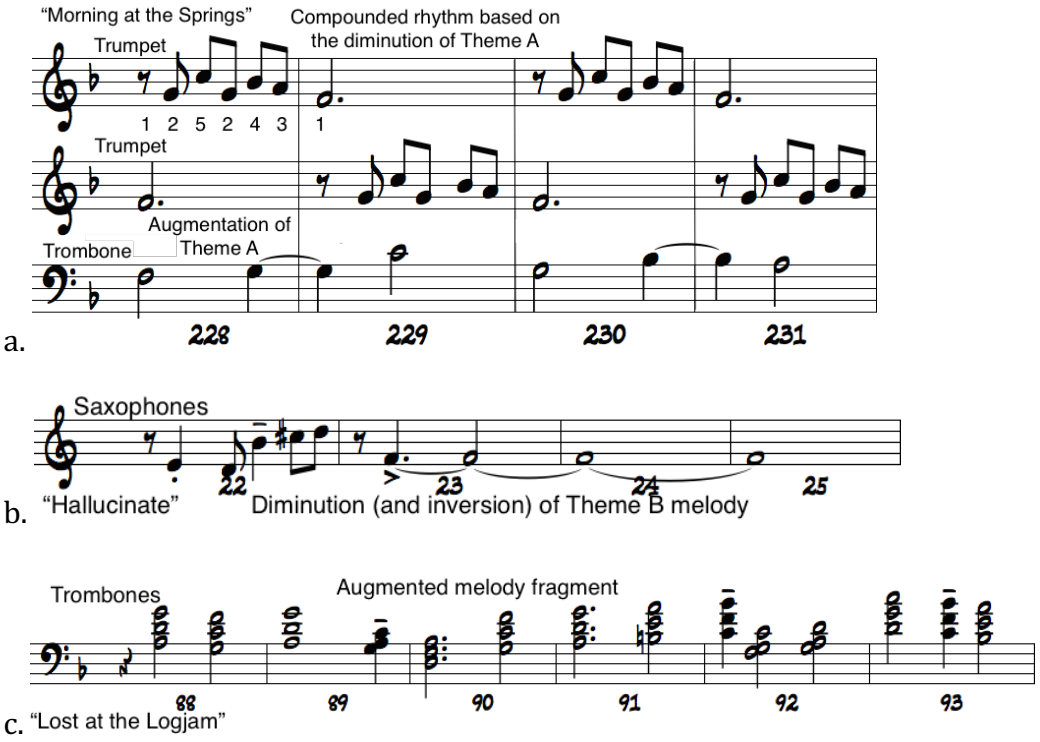
Figure 5.2: Rhythmically Loose Melodic Line from "The Bay to Seadrift"



One of the many methods to achieve rhythmic variation is through augmentation or diminution. By shrinking or lengthening a melody’s rhythmic structure, the melody becomes distorted from its original form. Sometimes a melody can be taken beyond immediate recognition if the relative rhythmic values are also changed, or if it is coupled with another variation technique such as inversion. Some of the most prevalent instances of augmentation and diminution are found in Figure 5.3. In the first example, Theme A (See Figure 3.1) is both diminished and augmented rhythmically. The two trumpets together play a constant running eighth note line that passing Theme A’s pitches back and forth. Meanwhile, the trombones stretch the same melody out to two beats per note. In Figure 5.3b, the saxophones play an

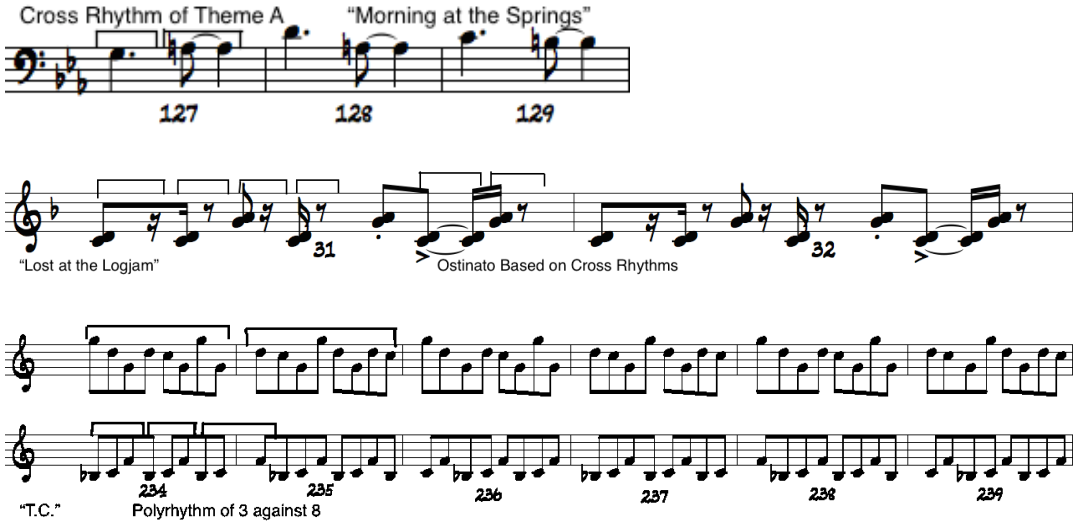
inversion of Theme B (see Figure 3.5) in diminution so that each note is half the length as its initial statement in 4 “Hallucinate.” The third example shows the trombones again playing a melody, this time from 5. “Lost at the Logjam,” in augmentation.

Figure 5.3: Diminution and Augmentation



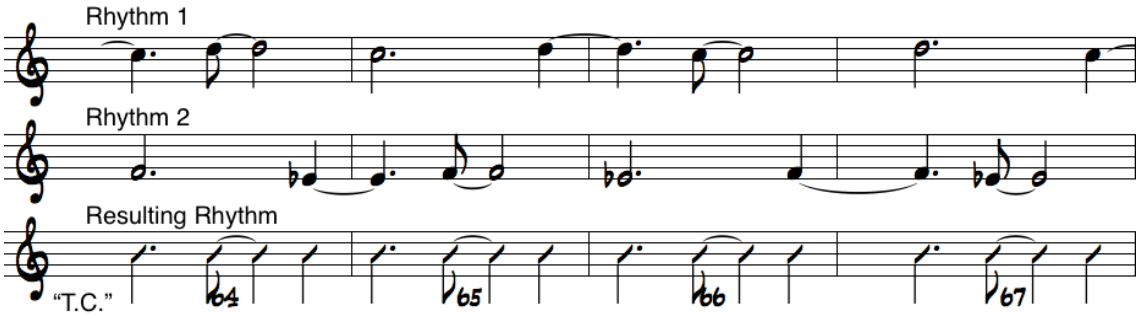
One of the techniques I use most often when writing is to emphasize cross rhythms and other polyrhythms. Cross rhythms are mainstays in jazz improvisational and compositional language. They help to displace the beat and create rhythmic interest within the written meter. Many polyrhythms accomplish the same ends. In Figure 5.4, a few of the prominent cross rhythms and polyrhythms from the suite are highlighted.

Figure 5.4: Cross Rhythms and Polyrhythms



A similar technique to cross rhythms and polyrhythms is the use of composite rhythms, or the resulting rhythm that emerges from two or more independent lines. Perhaps the best example of this can be found in 2. "T.C.." At m. 64, the alto saxophones and trumpets oppose the tenor saxophones and trombones with similar rhythmic patterns. In Figure 5.5, the two groups of instruments and their resulting rhythm can be examined.

Figure 5.5: Composite Rhythm

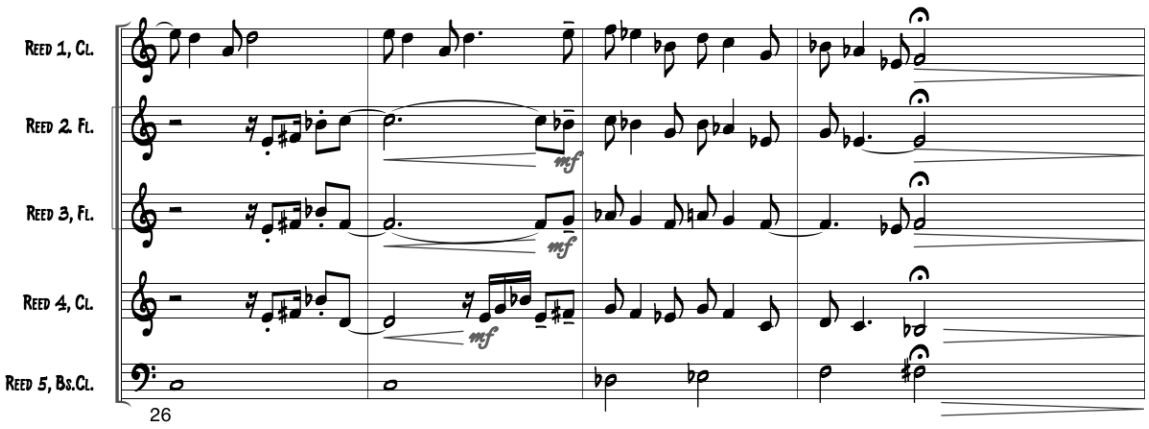


Chapter Six: Orchestration

When I write, I am rarely content rehashing something I have done before. I am always looking for new ideas and tricks that expand my knowledge and comfort zone as a composer. The same can be said for my approach to orchestration. While there are certain standard techniques for writing and arranging for jazz orchestra, I constantly look for new textures that may evoke moods I have not captured or energy levels I have not reached.

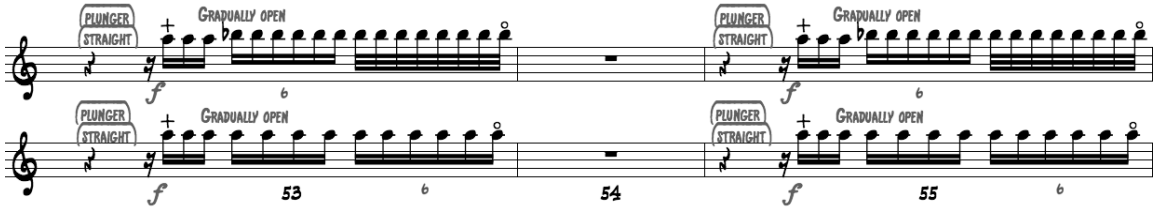
3. "Portage at Ottine" is one of the most texture-based pieces I have written for jazz orchestra. The use of instrument doubles and mixed brass mutes across the ensemble makes the ensemble sound less like a big band and more like a chamber ensemble. From the very beginning, the use of cajon instead of the full drumset creates more space in the orchestration. This allows for the horns to take more center stage, especially the clarinet and flute doubles like at m. 26 where clarinet takes over the melody and the other woodwinds accompany as can be seen in Figure 6.1. In a woodwind texture like this, it is unusual for the clarinet to take over the lead with two flutes, another clarinet, and bass clarinet below it.

Figure 6.1: Woodwind Ensemble



Another interesting texture can be found in the bridge of the solo section at m. 53. Here, first and second flugelhorns have switched to trumpets with a combination of straight mute and plunger. As the trumpets are instructed to gradually open the plunger, the sound and resulting rhythm are haunting. See Figure 6.2.

Figure 6.2: Muted Trumpets



Following the bridge in mm. 58-65, the trumpets and flugelhorns play a slightly varied version of the melody. Trumpets one and two are instructed to play with harmon and straight mutes respectively, and flugelhorn four uses a plunger. This mix of mutes keeps the melody subordinate to the solos that are wrapping up, but still allows a unique texture to cut through the texture.

Sometimes I found it necessary upon returning to a section of music to re-orchestrate it so as to not repeat it exactly the same way twice. There is nothing

wrong with repeating themes and particular scorings, but in an effort to evolve the music, I found that simple re-orchestrations made a difference in the piece's energy level. In 2. "T.C.," the melody at m. 72 is simply arranged for trumpets, flute, and rhythm section as can be seen in Figure 6.3. When this melodic figure returns in following the flute solo at m. 210, the original orchestration was not going to carry enough energy from the build that came just before. Therefore, I revoiced the trumpets up an octave, added trombones, and wrote a saxophone counterline. See Figure 6.4. This created a much more effective payoff before the tune began to dismantle itself.

Figure 6.3: "T.C." Melody First Statement

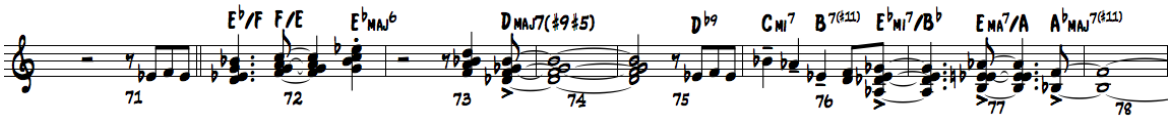
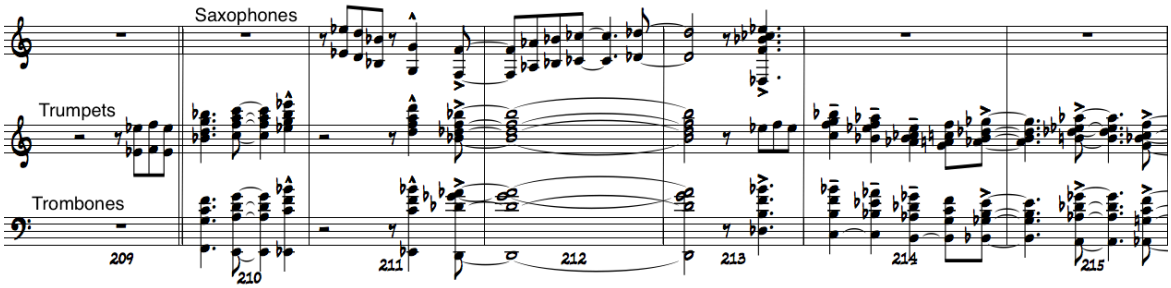
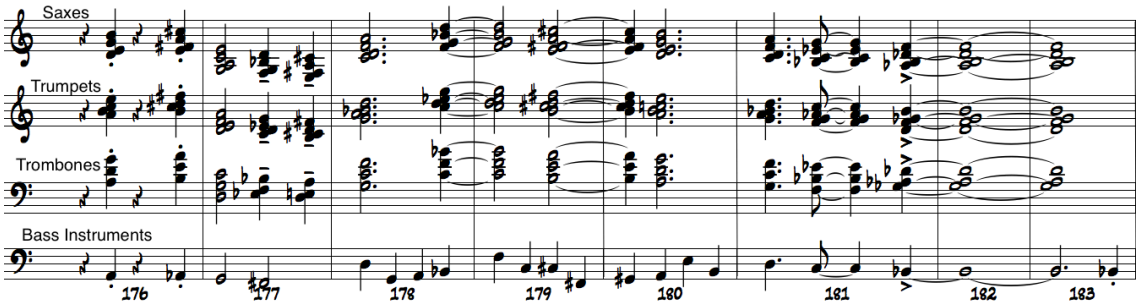


Figure 6.4: "T.C." Melody Re-Voiced for Second Statement



Similarly, I used the same reasoning for expanding the orchestration of Theme B in 4. "Hallucinate." The first time the full melody is stated at mm. 40-47 is just orchestrated for the brass section as it is displayed in Figure 4.3. When it returns, I add saxes and rhythm section at mm. 176-183. See Figure 6.5.

Figure 6.5: "Hallucinate" Melody Full Ensemble Voicing



In 6. "The Bay to Seadrift," the first time I introduce the melody at m. 19, it is written in a relatively lean three-voice texture. However, when the full melodic statement comes in at m. 73, I rewrote it to add a fourth voice. As is shown in Figure 6.6, the original voicing is primarily in fourths except for a couple choice landing chords. In Figure 6.7, the added fourth voice thickens the texture not just harmonically, but also because extra members from the ensemble are required to play the added line.

Figure 6.6: Three-Voice Melody

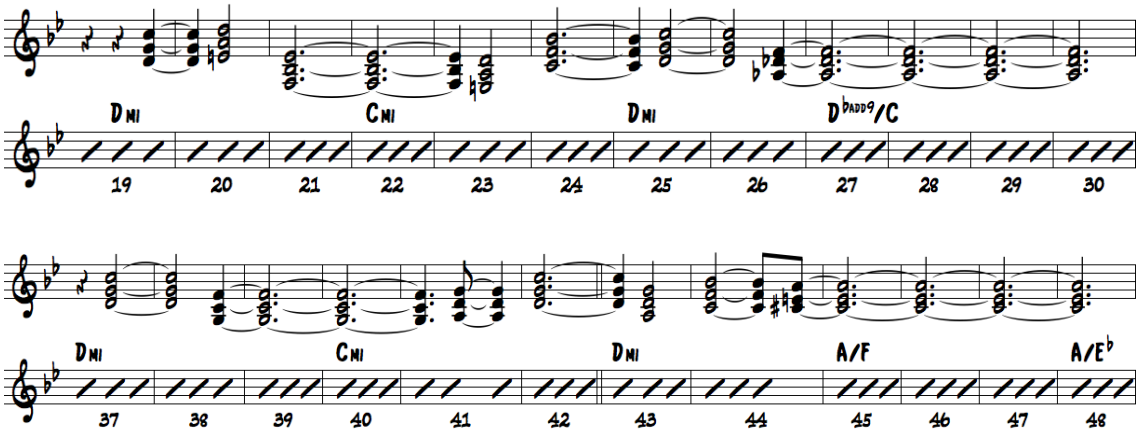
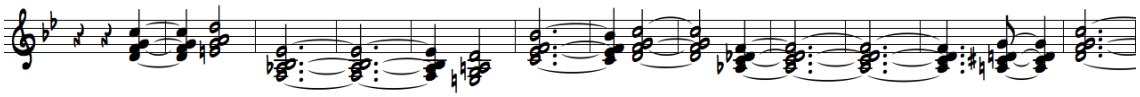
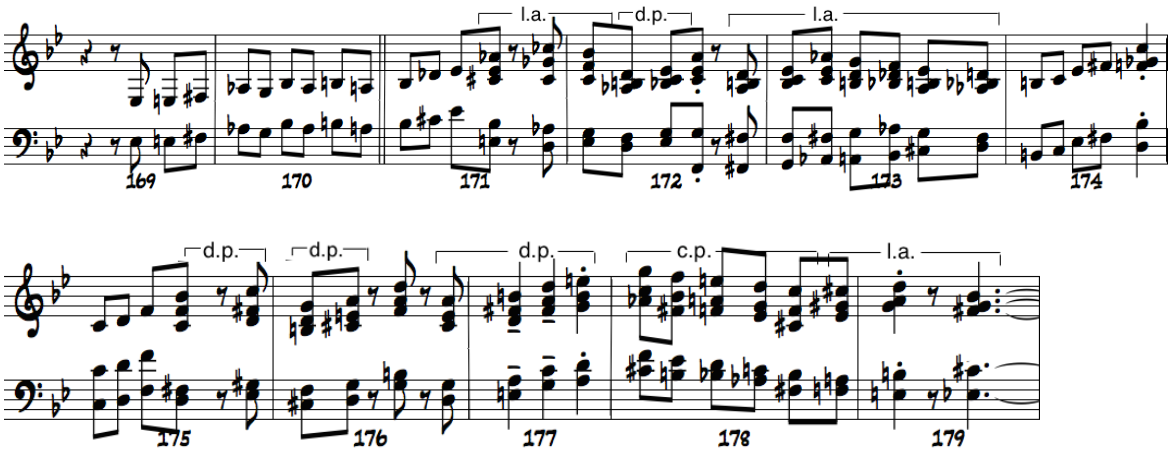


Figure 6.7: Four-Voice Melody (Excerpt)



As the writing process continued, I realized that I had very few places in which the saxophone section played as an ensemble itself. In order to include a sound and texture that is commonplace in big band writing, I composed a short saxophone soli in 6. "The Bay to Seadrift." To harmonize the line, I used a combination of linear approach (l.a.), diatonic planning (d.p.) and chromatic planning (c.p.). See Figure 6.8.

Figure 6.8: Saxophone Soli in "The Bay to Seadrift"



One more compositional device I enjoy using is to feature the drumset as a melodic instrument. Interlude III is a drum solo that sets up not just the time and feel at the start of 4. "Hallucinate," but also serves to introduce the melody. The drums rhythmically state melodic fragments similarly to the way the ensemble builds the theme at the start of 4. "Hallucinate." This method helps set up expectations for the listener both in terms of rhythm and melody.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

RIVER is the first large form jazz composition that I have written for big band, and because of challenges associated with writing for a jazz orchestra, the process has been an invaluable learning experience. While I have written several works for big band, this was the first that I strove to connect deeply through thematic development. To do this across several movements requires an incredible amount of planning and creative energy.

However, composing the suite was a great exercise in taking an idea and exploring a multitude of its melodic and harmonic possibilities to the fullest extent. It amazed me how many ways I could take Theme A and twist it into a background figure in one place, then fragment it and build a new melody from its components. This is a skill that readily transfers to any other project both in composition and improvisation that I may encounter.

In writing *RIVER*, I discovered new combinations of instrument colors that I enjoy, investigated styles in which I have seldom written, and challenged myself to break free of my compositional comfort zone. 3. “Portage at Ottine” stretched my textural palette and forced me to explore new sounds. Alternatively, having never written a fast swing composition for large ensemble, 4. “Hallucinate” pushed me melodically and rhythmically to find the shapes and phrases that would appropriately capture the excitement I heard in my head. I feel this project has produced some of my most interesting writing thus far in my writing career.

Looking back on the compositional process, I recall how many times I changed

my mind about decisions related to movement order, lengths, titles, musical ideas, and programmatic concepts. Just as the themes in *RIVER* kept evolving, so did the suite throughout the planning and writing phases. This helped remind me that writing music is a fluid process. Sitting down to write never feels the same way twice.

Should I write another long-form work for jazz orchestra in the near future, I now have a wealth of experiences from which to draw. Writing six movements was an ambitious goal, as was the incorporation of pre-recorded media. On top of juggling those responsibilities, I also led rehearsals and directed the band in concert. While the result was satisfactory, I would likely hand off at least one of those jobs to another musician to allow myself the mental space to focus on fewer tasks.

With the skills I gained preparing *RIVER*, I believe the next large project I take on will not feel as nearly as daunting. That said, each composition has its own challenges and takes on a life all its own. If I improved upon one aspect of my writing, I believe it was the ability to make good musical decisions more quickly, which is a strength of composers who are adept at meeting quick deadlines. In the final weeks leading up to the premier of *RIVER*, I was able to meet every deadline I set for myself.

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